

The More Life Changes, the More It Stays The Same *by Linda Hunter*

It was about 2:30 on a bright, sunny September afternoon in 1906 when train 215 out of London arrived at the No. 3 platform of the Midland Railway Station in St. Albans, Hertfordshire. It was a busy afternoon as passengers disembarked from their compartments and porters were collecting the luggage. Charles Thomson Hunter was one of the last to leave the train, still reading his newspaper as he crossed three sets of tracks oblivious of what was to come.

At the inquest into his death, it was testified that the up-and-down expresses were signalled when it was noted that C.T. was about to cross over the lines that the two express trains were travelling. As one witness testified, he cried out, "Mr. Hunter, look out, there are two trains signalled; the up-and-down expresses". Apparently C.T. took no notice and continued to walk on, all the while passengers and railway staff were shouting to him to stay back. At the last moment he did see one express coming and immediately ran forward. It appeared that he had successfully cleared the tracks but was caught by the second express and pieces of his body were carried some distance along the tracks.

This was a most unfortunate turn of events. C.T. had been in London for several months petitioning the Imperial Government and the Colonial Office for permission to build the Frontier Railway in British Honduras. For over thirty years he sought permission of the Colonial Office and this was his most recent attempt to obtain such permission.

Lord Elgin and Winston Churchill initially had rebuffed C.T. as they were busy with affairs of their party and were not able to devote much time to British Honduras. After many months of daily lobbying powerful politicians and men of influence in the Empire's capital, it appeared that finally he was succeeding and was to shortly head back to British Honduras with the good news that was anxiously awaited.

Instead, with grey skies and rain pouring down, his final voyage was by a handsome open hearse, drawn by a pair of silky black horses, from the City Mortuary to his interment in a grave lined with rosemary and laurel. His widow had retained her composure during the service but collapsed at the end, falling to her knees by the open grave into which she threw her bouquet of white lilies and tuberose. It was not lost on his mourners, nor on the inhabitants of British Honduras that Charles Thomson Hunter was killed as much by the prospective railroad that he championed for his adopted country as the actual one in his native land.

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This was, indeed, a tragedy and while the Inquest ruled his death accidental, is there a modern lesson to be learned? More than a century later, the busyness of the rail stations of yesterday is replicated in the streets and roads of our modern communities where people reading their cell phones and fast moving vehicles vie for the same space. And in spite of traffic signals, warnings shouted from the sidewalks and horns blaring, somewhere, today, someone whose eyes are glued to their mobile device will attempt to cross the street, oblivious to the vehicular traffic and will step in front of a car or truck and face the same fate as Charles Thomson Hunter.